The Parable of the Dishonest Manager: A Study Guide for Further Reading

Introduction

This guide gathers academic sources, historical background, and additional reading materials on the Parable of the Dishonest Manager, also known as the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13), organized by topic, for those who wish to explore this fascinating and unusually debated parable in greater depth.

1. The Biblical Text

Primary Source:
Luke 16:1-13, in any standard translation (King James Version, New International Version, English Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version).

Free online access:
Bible Gateway: www.biblegateway.com
Blue Letter Bible (includes Greek word study tools): www.blueletterbible.org
Bible Hub (includes interlinear Greek text): www.biblehub.com

For readers interested in the original Greek text, both Blue Letter Bible and Bible Hub allow you to click on individual words to examine the original Greek terms, their transliteration, and their range of meanings, which is particularly useful for studying key terms in this parable such as oikonomos, the Greek word translated as manager or steward.

2. On the Parables of Jesus in General

Jeremias, Joachim. The Parables of Jesus. Revised edition. New York: Scribner, 1972.
A foundational twentieth-century work on the historical and cultural context of Jesus's parables. Jeremias devotes considerable attention to the Parable of the Dishonest Manager, proposing an influential interpretation involving hidden interest and commission structures in first century lending. Widely available in university libraries and used bookstores.

Bailey, Kenneth E. Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes (combined edition). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
Bailey's work focuses on Middle Eastern cultural context, drawing on decades of living and teaching in the Middle East. He offers an alternative reading of this parable that treats the manager's actions as

genuine fraud rather than the forfeiture of commission, and his work is frequently cited in comparative discussions of the two main interpretive approaches.

Snodgrass, Klyne. Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
A comprehensive scholarly treatment of all the parables, including an extensive chapter on the Dishonest Manager that surveys the major interpretive positions and their strengths and weaknesses.

2. Academic Commentaries on the Gospel of Luke

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes. Anchor Bible Commentary Series. New York: Doubleday, 1985.
A detailed academic commentary that addresses the economic context of the debts mentioned in the parable, including their likely connection to agricultural lease agreements between landowners and tenant farmers.

Marshall, I. Howard. The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
A widely respected commentary offering detailed exegetical notes on the Greek text of Luke 16:1-13, including discussion of the difficult phrase regarding the master commending the manager for his shrewdness.

Bock, Darrell L. Luke, Volume 2: 9:51-24:53. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.
Provides a balanced overview of competing scholarly interpretations of the parable, along with careful attention to its placement within Luke's broader narrative structure.

3. On First Century Jewish Law Regarding Interest and Debt

Deuteronomy 23:19-20, the biblical prohibition against charging interest to fellow Israelites, foundational for understanding why hidden interest practices may have developed. Available through the same Bible reading resources listed in section 1.

Neufeld, Edward. "The Prohibitions Against Loans at Interest in Ancient Hebrew Laws." Hebrew Union College Annual 26 (1955): 355-412.
An academic article examining how biblical interest prohibitions were understood and sometimes circumvented in practice during the Second Temple period.

Free online resource:
The Jewish Virtual Library (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org) contains accessible overviews of Jewish legal concepts, including usury laws, that provide useful background for general readers.

4. On First-Century Estate Management and Tenant Farming

Rohrbaugh, Richard L. "A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror?" Biblical Theology Bulletin 23, no. 1 (1993): 32-39.
Although focused on a different parable, this article provides valuable background on the social and economic dynamics between landowners, stewards, and tenant farmers in first century Judea and Galilee, directly relevant to understanding the world of the Dishonest Manager.

Oakman, Douglas E. Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986.
A detailed study of the economic conditions of first century Palestine, including estate management, debt, and the social role of stewards, offering useful grounding for the parable's economic assumptions.

Free online resource:
The Biblical Archaeology Society maintains a free article archive at www.biblicalarchaeology.org, with several articles addressing daily economic life, land tenancy, and debt in Roman controlled Judea and Galilee.

5. On the Literary Context Within Luke's Gospel

For readers interested in how this parable relates to the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), both of which appear immediately before and after this passage, see the relevant sections in Snodgrass's Stories with Intent and Bock's Luke commentary (both cited above), which discuss Luke's intentional grouping of these three parables around the shared theme of wealth and stewardship.

6. Suggested Order for Further Study

For readers new to this topic, we suggest the following approach.

Begin by reading Luke 16:1-13 in two or three different translations side by side using Bible Gateway, paying attention to how different translations render the ambiguous details of the manager's actions. Then read the relevant chapter in either Jeremias's or Bailey's book to encounter the two main competing interpretations, the hidden commission theory and the genuine fraud theory, presented by their most influential proponents. Follow this with Fitzmyer's or Bock's commentary for a more technical exegetical treatment of the Greek text and the economic details of the debts mentioned. Finally, explore the surrounding parables in Luke 15 and 16 to understand how this passage fits within Luke's broader argument about wealth, stewardship, and faithfulness.

A Note on This Guide

This document was compiled to support independent, deeper study of the Parable of the Dishonest Manager. All sources listed are legitimate academic and publicly accessible materials. Where possible, we have prioritized free online resources alongside standard academic publications available through libraries. Readers are encouraged to consult these sources directly, particularly given that this parable remains genuinely unresolved among scholars, for a fuller and more nuanced understanding of one of the most debated texts in the New Testament.